

# **The Links Between Student Wellbeing and Academic Success**

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## **What do we know about student wellbeing?**

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- It's both an emotional state and a subjective perception by the student
- It's about satisfaction
- It is linked to learning
- There is no agreed definition of what it is
- It isn't 'directional' (just as 'health' isn't directional but 'good health' is)
- We have no adequate measure of overall student wellbeing per se but most of its components can be measured

## What is student wellbeing?

**Optimal student wellbeing** is a sustainable emotional condition characterised by predominantly positive mood & attitude, positive relationships at school, resilience, self-optimisation and satisfaction with learning experiences

### **Student wellbeing is a sustainable condition**

It can be maintained over time despite minor variations triggered by life events.

### **Resilience**

The ability to cope and bounce back after negative events or adversity and to return to a state of wellbeing; the capacity to respond adaptively to difficult circumstances and still thrive.

**Self-optimisation**

A realistic awareness of (& predominantly positive judgment about) one's abilities, strengths, behaviour and learning; striving to maximise one's perceived potentials & get the best out of oneself.

**Satisfaction with learning experiences at school**

Satisfaction with the nature, quality, relevance and outcomes of learning experiences at school

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## Links with academic success

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The links with academic success are not with student wellbeing per se as this has not been adequately measured in research studies.

However there are strong links between academic success and its components and *the factors that contribute to student wellbeing*

## 1. Attendance

Optimal wellbeing is linked to better attendance and therefore to:

- Better relationships with teachers and other students
- Increased learning time
- Lower levels of dropping out of school

*This is a bi-directional process ie wellbeing increases attendance and then increased attendance further enhances wellbeing*

## 2. Engagement and Participation

Optimal wellbeing is linked to higher levels of engagement with and participation in learning. These lead to:

- Better relationships with teachers and other students
- Increased confidence about learning tasks

*This is another bi-directional process ie wellbeing increases engagement and then engagement further increases wellbeing*

### 3. Motivation to learn & achieve

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Optimal wellbeing is linked to higher levels of motivation to learn and achieve. This also leads to stronger relationships with teachers

*This is another bi-directional process ie wellbeing improves motivation and being more motivated to learn and achieve further increases wellbeing*

### 4. Decreased Negative Behaviour

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Students with optimal levels of wellbeing misbehave less and improved behaviour :

- Reduces the time spent away from learning (eg through isolation, detention and suspension)
- Strengthens teacher-student relationships

*This is another bi-directional process ie wellbeing reduces negative behaviour and this further increases wellbeing*

## The Key Factors which Contribute to Student Wellbeing

- The key factors are inter-related but still discrete enough to be separable
- The key factors are also bi-directional ie they contribute to wellbeing and wellbeing then further enhances the factor *eg feeling safe at school increases wellbeing and students with high levels of wellbeing behave in ways that promote safe and responsible behaviour*

## The Key Factors

- Being part of a caring, respectful and inclusive learning environment
- Feeling safe at school
- Social and emotional skills
- Knowing and using one's own strengths
- Pro-social values
- A sense of meaning and purpose
- A healthy lifestyle

## 1. Being Part of a Caring, Respectful and Inclusive Learning Environment

This type of learning environment is characterised by:

- Positive peer relationships
- Positive teacher-student relationships
- A sense of belonging
- Respectful and supportive behaviour
- Family involvement with the school

## How can this be achieved?

Examples

- An action plan to further involve parents
- The intentional development of peer relationships (eg cooperative learning, random grouping, group projects )
- Teachers finding ways to get to 'know' their students (*eg digital stories, 'banking time', showing interest in their lives outside school*)
- The use of 'whole-class' activities, games and goals
- A campaign to promote 'respectful behaviour'
- Cross-age activities

## And also by using cooperative learning

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- Group goal (*'we sink or swim together'*)
- Individual accountability (*eg roles*)
- Social skills focus (*eg negotiation; respectful disagreeing*)
- Group processing and reflection (*eg well did we negotiate?*)

## Example: Multiply and Merge (M & M)

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1. Each student writes six adjectives to describe the beach
2. They form pairs and negotiate the best six of their 12 words
3. The pairs then merge their six best words with those of another pair and they negotiate the ultimate best six between the four of them

*Or perhaps the 10 most important points in an article?*

*Or the best way to tackle a maths problem?*



## Can cooperative learning go too far?

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### **Kids plot to attack teacher**

*Melbourne Herald Sun, April 03, 2008*

‘A group of five third-graders in the USA who were unhappy with what they saw as their teacher’s unfairness, plotted to attack her, arming themselves with a broken steak knife, handcuffs, tape and other items for the job. The children assigned tasks, including covering the windows and cleaning up afterwards, police said’.

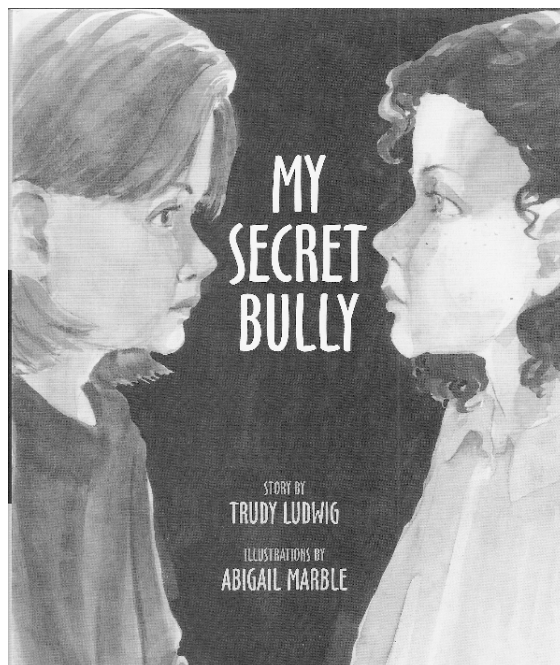
## Feeling Safe at school

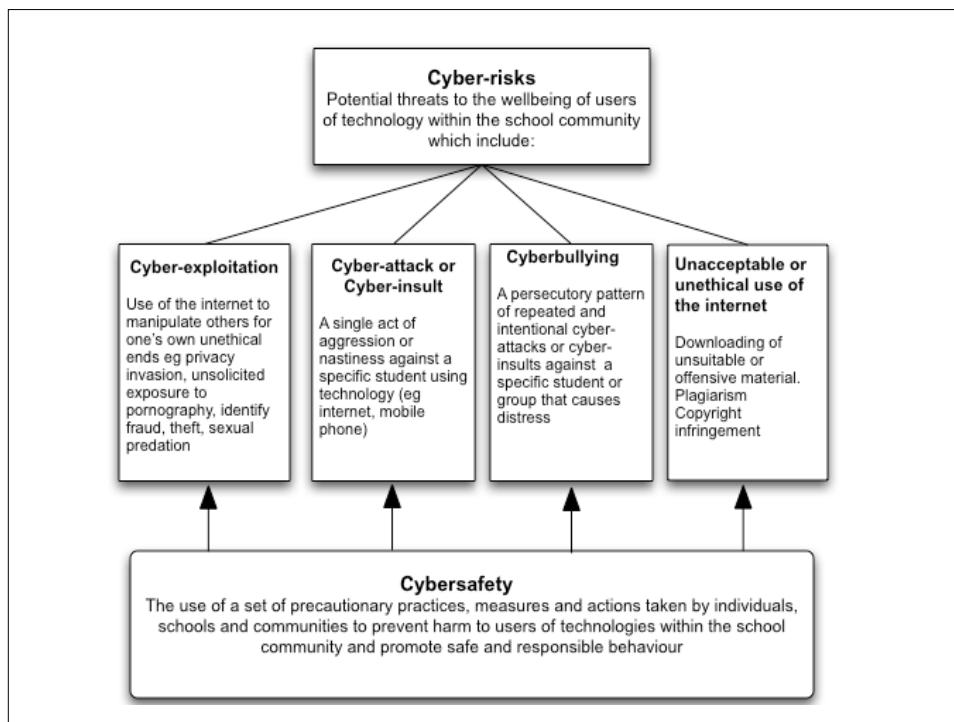
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Learning in an environment free from bullying, putdowns, cyber-harm & violence

## How can schools help students feel safe?

- Have a 'No putdowns' rule
- Teach the skill of respectful disagreeing
- Address bullying
- Focus on cybersafety ( *a set of precautionary policies, practices and actions taken by students and schools that prevent harm by users of technologies within the school and promote safe and responsible behaviour*)





## Social and Emotional Skills for:

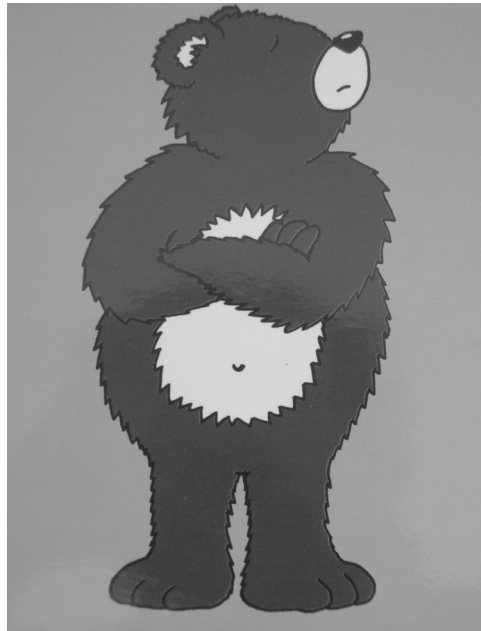
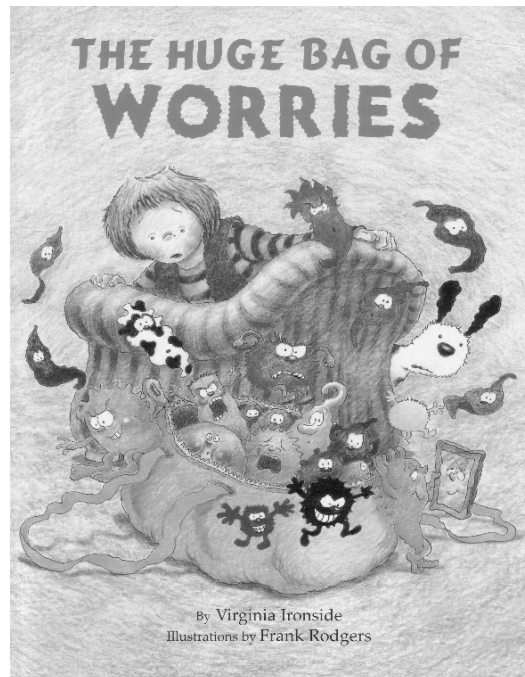
- Understanding and reflecting on one's own learning
- Self-management
- Coping and acting resiliently
- Empathic responding
- Optimistic thinking
- Goal achievement
- Successful relationships

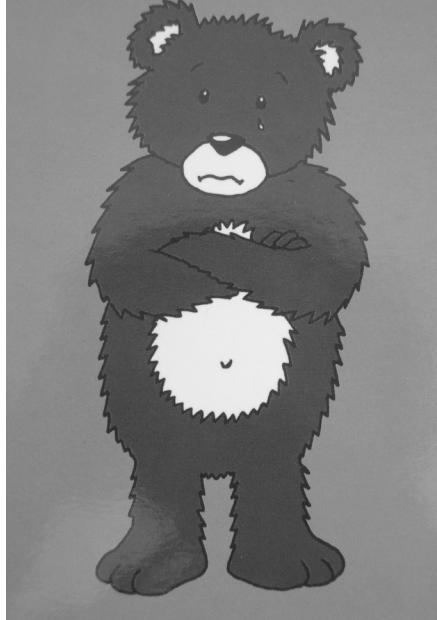
## What needs to happen?

- A literature-based SEL curriculum which is customised and embedded
- Explicit teaching of skills
- Opportunities for students to practise and reflect

## Self-management

- Regulating one's emotions to handle stress and control impulses
- Being resilient and persevering in overcoming obstacles
- Setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals
- Understanding one's own feelings and expressing them appropriately



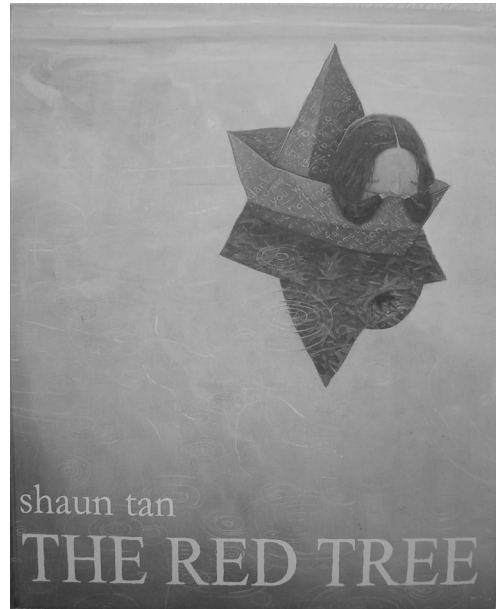


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Using helpful thinking

## Using optimistic thinking





## WHAT KIND OF TRACKER ARE YOU?

**BLM**  
**5.2**

Tick the box that best shows what you think and do.

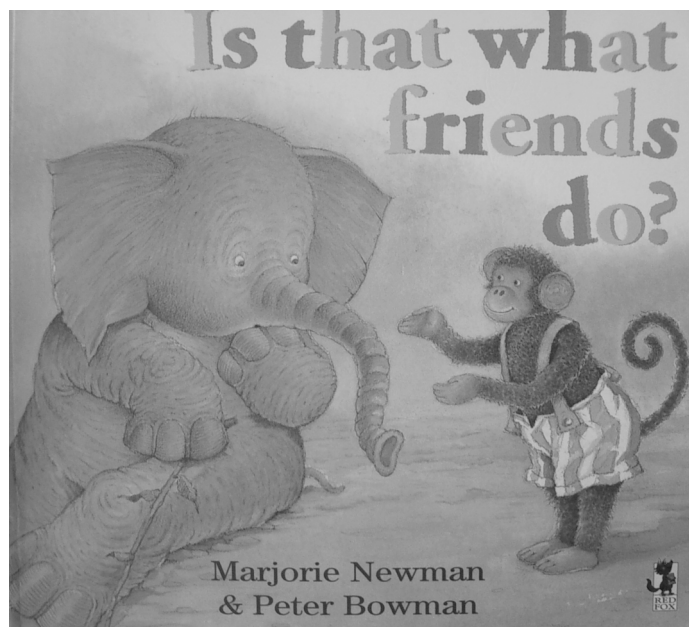
	Column A	Column B	Column C
1. Do you talk a lot about the things that go well in your day?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often
2. Do you look for and notice the mistakes that people make rather than what they do well?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often
3. Do you give yourself a very hard time when you get something wrong or forget something?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often
4. Do you talk about what you like about people you know?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often
5. Do you notice and talk about the things you do well?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often
6. Do you talk about the bad things about other people?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often
7. Do you pay attention to what you like about how you look rather than what you don't like?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often
8. Do you focus a lot on the things you can't do well?	Yes, a lot	Sometimes	Not often

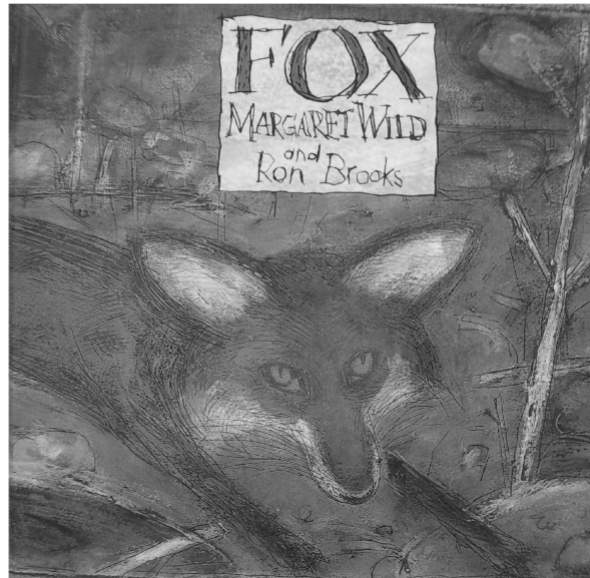


## Setting and achieving goals

### Relationship skills

- Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation and effective social skills
- Resisting social pressure
- Preventing, managing and resolving conflict
- Seeking help when needed





## Empathy

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Empathy underpins positive relationships and moral development

# What is Empathy?

## **Cognitive Components**

- Reading other people's feelings
- Seeing things from different perspectives

## **Emotional components**

Feeling another's feelings (to some degree) in a vicarious way (even if they are fictional!)

## **Action components**

Responding with kindness to another's distress

There are individual variations in capacity for empathy but it can also be taught to some degree

**BLM**  
**6.8**

The word 'empathy' means trying to understand how someone else is feeling. If you can work out how they might be feeling, you can more easily show kindness and support and work out their intentions towards you.

- Can I remember how I felt and what I thought at the time?

- What have others close to me told me about how *they* felt in similar circumstances? (For example, if someone else seems to be shy, can I remember what another has told me about feeling shy?)

- What have I read or seen on television or in the movies which tells me something about how this person might be feeling or thinking? (Be a bit careful here! Lots of television shows and movies give you the wrong ideas about people's feelings, because they make things seem too simple.)

- If I haven't had a similar experience myself, can I use my imagination and try to predict how I would feel in the situation (e.g. If that was me, I think I would be thinking . . . and feeling . . .).

- The best thing to say is a simple statement of your understanding

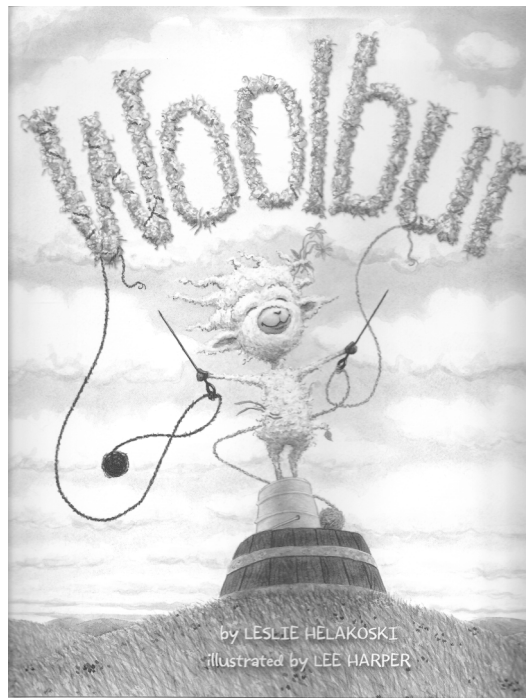
- Sometimes it can be helpful to share with them a similar experience (e.g. 'That happened to me when I started at my last school').
- Sometimes you could say what you imagine you would be feeling in their situation (e.g. 'I think I'd feel pretty angry too if that had happened to me').

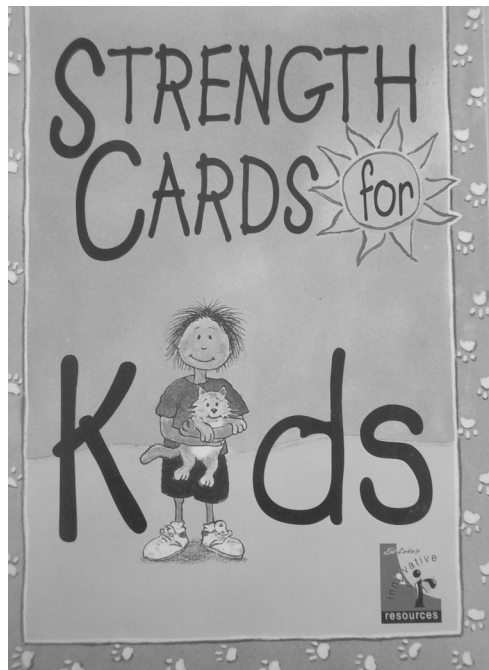
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Restorative practices can also encourage the development of empathy

## Knowing and Using One's Strengths

- Evidence-based self knowledge about all types of strengths eg intellectual, character and physical strengths
- Being 'known' by others for one's strengths
- Access to opportunities to use and enhance strengths

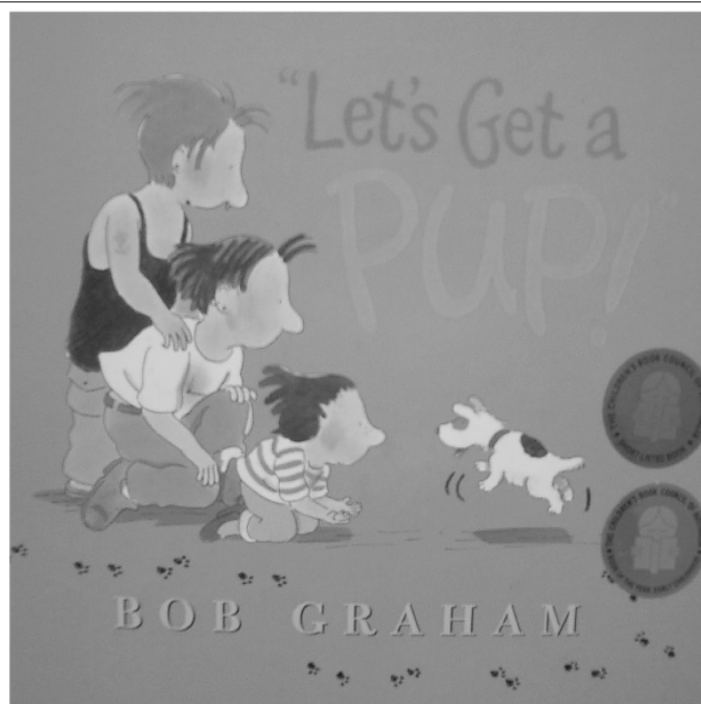




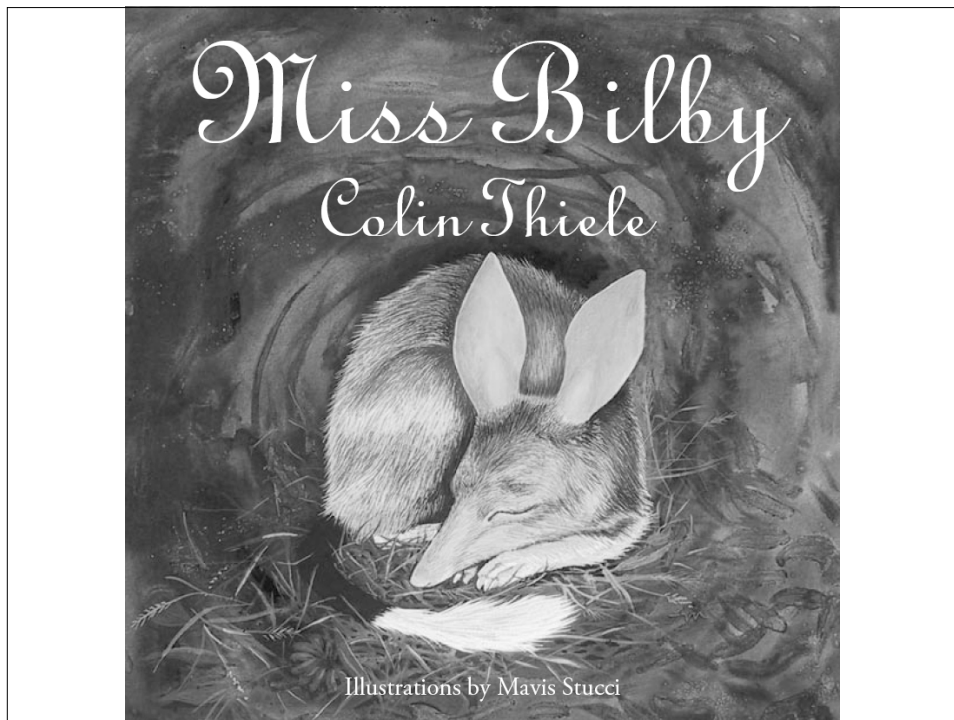
## A Multiple Intelligences Approach

## Having and Using Pro-social Values

- Support (Compassion or Care)
- Cooperation
- Acceptance of differences
- Respect
- Friendliness and inclusion
- Honesty
- Responsibility







## Having a Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Students have a sense of '*meaning*' when they are engaging in an activity which positively affects people other than themselves.

They have a sense of '*purpose*' when they pursue worthwhile goals or goals related to their interests

## How can schools help students to develop this?

- Spiritual exploration
- School achievement
- Peer support(eg buddy programs, peer mediation)
- School leadership
- Worthwhile group tasks (eg SOLAR tasks)
- Involvement in team Sports involvement
- Civic participation and community service
- Contribution to the school community
- Extra-curricular activities (eg band,choir)
- Student ownership of resources

## A Healthy Lifestyle

- Fitness
- Nutrition
- Hygiene
- Avoidance of self-harm and misuse of drugs & alcohol

## In conclusion

There is a strong link between wellbeing and academic success via attendance, engagement, motivation and decreased misbehaviour.

We can successfully enhance student wellbeing by the adoption of strategies that strengthen the factors that contribute to it

## But.....

In doing so we also need to remember some important guidelines.

- Planning for sustainability is essential
- Customising and embedding programs and approaches is more effective (but without removing the active ingredients)
- It's good to avoid being a 'Christmas Tree' School (*Fullan*)